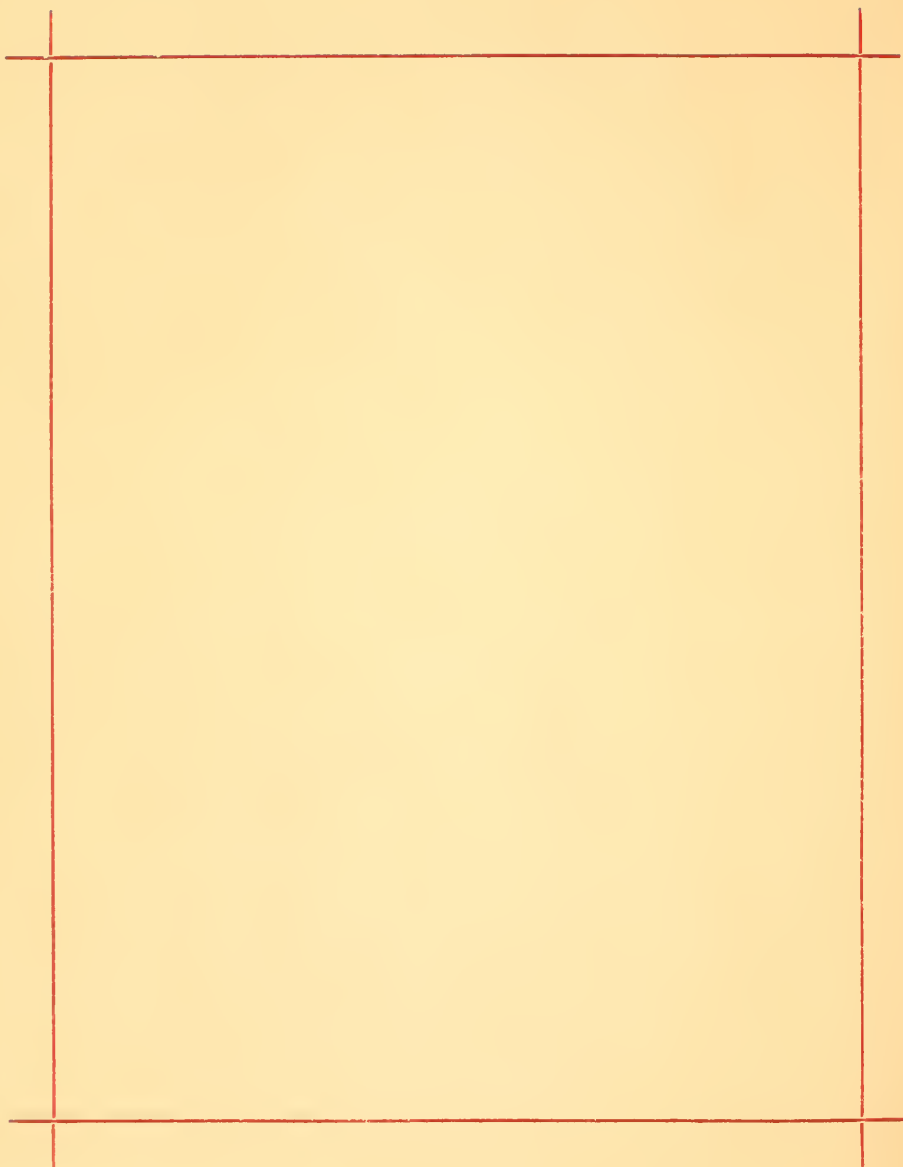


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The Day of All Saints

AT NEW ORLEANS.

ROBERT CLARKE & Co., Printers.



The Day of All Saints,
AT NEW ORLEANS,

November 1st. 1845.



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To

ROBERT BUCHANAN:

You and I are the survivors of a party of gentlemen who, loving the science of Botany, wandered over the hills which surround Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport, more years ago than either of us would like to acknowledge.

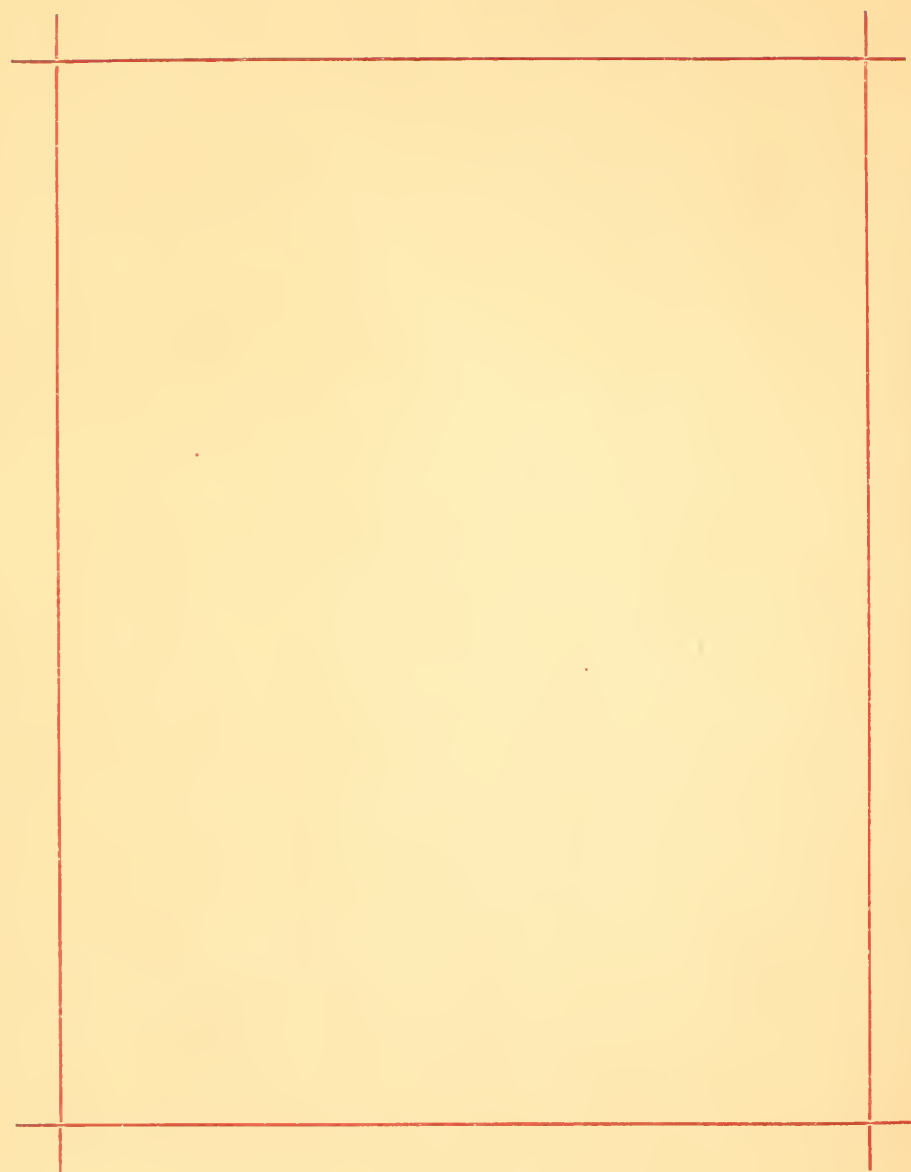
This fugitive has gone about, disfigured and misprinted, until I am fairly called upon to take up my child, and give it, at least, a decent suit of clothes.

Remembering, as a boy, the kindness you did me when kindness was valuable, I have honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

G. E. PUGH.



All-Saints-Day.

I ROSE very early, anxious to get a sight of the great capital, and made my way over the cotton bales which were piled upon the forecastle and guards of our steamer. Once upon the levee, my emotion was of the highest delight—long-expected pleasure gratified to the full. I was at last in New Orleans; and, at six of the morning, the walks were thronged with people intent on business. I had seen nothing like it since I left home. It was Sunday when we were at Louisville, and almost dark when I rambled through Memphis. Natchez was a beautiful and indolent city, where business seemed but the adjunct of pleasure. Here, however, was bustle—mighty Commerce, with her mes-

sengers ; vast wealth employed ; everybody at work. Home—my native Cincinnati—rose up to mind. The sky above was gloriously clear ; the sun gilding the domes of St. Charles and St. Louis, pouring floods of gladness upon the wide levee and the noble river.

With some difficulty I succeeded in getting the ear of a lazy black boy, who sat upon the box of a venerable hack, and made him understand that I would be carried, with my trunk and movables, to the St. Charles Hotel. Behold me, however, seated in the rotunda of that splendid establishment, about ten o'clock, after a hearty breakfast ; not without having run quite around the city already. My eye, for want of a better occupation, fell upon a paragraph in the *Picayune*, a copy of which paper I had bought from a boy at the door of the breakfast room, announcing that this was All-Saints-Day—the 1st of November—when the cemeteries would be dressed with flowers. I had often heard of the custom ; and far away, in the cold North, my heart had warmed with love for those who thus did honor to the dead. I shall now behold it, with my own eyes, said I to myself ; but will the reality equal the imagination ?

The next point to be solved was, where to find the cemeteries. I was an utter stranger, and did not remember to have seen a place of burial in my walks. I could inquire of nobody. There were half a dozen old gentlemen sitting about, intent upon reading the news, and several well-dressed loungers of

the younger sort. There, too, was the polite individual "who keeps the office," and who would, doubtless, have enlightened one—that is, have told me which way to turn, and the names of the streets. But it would all have been so much Sanscrit to me; and, besides, who would display the least sentiment before strangers?

So I sauntered out, upon my own bent, toward the French town. There I saw, by and by, a black girl with a basket of flowers upon her head—dahlias, japonicas, and the pale, sweet Chickasaw rose. New Orleans is the greatest place for green-houses I ever saw: you find them scattered along the most public streets, enlivening the very air with their beauty and fragrance. There was a large one above the St. Charles, at the opposite corner of Gravier street, and another on a small street, at the other side of the hotel, right beneath my window.

But I have lost my story almost, and my guide as well. I had followed her at some distance, thinking she was bound for the cemetery, until she turned aside into a narrow lane and entered a house. Here I was quite at a loss, and with no one to ask—for everybody around me was talking French in furious style, and, really, I could not recall any phrase of that language to express my wishes. Luckily, however, the girl reappeared, and with her came out two ladies, one quite youthful and the other aged, both dressed in deep mourning, with black veils over their faces.

I followed at a respectful distance, trying to behave as if I did not notice them, and was only lounging along the street. They went a great way, turned up many avenues, stopped at several doors ; but finally they came in sight of an old church—the Mortuary Chapel, as I afterward learned, at the junction of Rue des Remparts and Rue de Conti. A few more steps brought us to the Cemetery of St. Louis, a square inclosed by a low wall of brick. There was quite a number of people, men and boys, principally negroes, collected around the entrance ; and I hesitated a moment whether I might be allowed to go in. But I made bold and entered, nobody interposing the least objection.

I can not describe the cemetery so as to give any one much idea of it. They never *bury* the dead in New Orleans : the soil is damp and miry, and the graves would fill with water. So they build tombs of brick upon the surface of the earth, to the highth of three or four feet, or more, with a hole in the side for the coffin to be inserted. This is then closed by a marble or stone slab containing the epitaph. The tomb is covered with plaster on the outside, and painted blue, with specks of white and black, much the color of chimney jams I have sometimes seen. Above the slab there is often a small black mantel-piece, and below, in front, there is a paved space, like a hearth somewhat, and stained red. At the sides of this there are little parterres, some filled with growing plants, some with a single box-tree in the center, and set off with white shells. Around

the whole a railing is generally erected to keep off impious hands.

In some parts of the cemetery the tombs were already decked. Flowers and leaves were strewn upon the top and upon the hearth in front. On the mantel-pieces were vases full of bouquets, and sometimes pots of rare plants. Beautiful dahlias, rudely plucked from their nourishing stems by the hand of affection, were stuck into the strange earth around. Splendid candelabras stood upon the hearth, decorated with paper fantastically cut, holding up long wax tapers of various colors. I looked about me with a sad pleasure. The grave, thought I, has lost its terrors—it is but to lie down and sleep upon a bed of roses. Affection is not quenched when the chill of death invades those most dear to us. Their tender memories revive with the new birth of the flowers; their faces and their forms revisit our longing eyes; their low words charm again our ears as when life was once made sweet to us by their presence. Love is the conqueror of Fate itself:

“Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove;
Oh, no! It is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth ’s unknown, although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come ;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

And when we shall have fretted our brief lives away, let there be steps which will kindly seek out our last homes, and hands which will sacrifice to us the flowers, as often as spring returns, or summer fades into autumn.

Other parts of the cemetery were thronged with workmen repairing the plaster upon the tombs from the ravages of time and weather—some painting them again, or furbishing up the inscriptions. There were, also, troops of quadron girls and ancient negresses, arranging wreaths and long trailing festoons of flowers, and hanging over the epitaphs beautiful lace veils. I observed these marks of tender and affectionate respect with emotions which I need not express.

Another part of the cemetery contained some very old tombs with quaint French inscriptions—the tombs of those who were distinguished citizens before Louisiana was purchased by the United States. Some had been rent asunder by trees growing close beside them ; others appeared to have been repaired and decked, year after year, until those who attended them had dropped off to death, and become the subjects of the same holy office which they had so long administered. These were mostly moldering into piles of rubbish, and soon would be indistin-

guishable from the dust around. Some, however, and very old ones, were still adorned by the hands of grateful and affectionate descendants.

I next took a view of the catacombs, which are rows of sepulture running all along the sides of the cemetery. There are three tiers in each, and the dead are divided one from another by slight partitions of brick. Of course, the catacombs are for poor people ; and those which I saw were crowded. The only space for an epitaph is about two feet square ; it is upon the slab which covers the opening to admit the coffin. Many of these places of rest were decorated with small mantel-pieces and hearths, and strewn in front by leaves and flowers. Others had squares of painted board merely to close the cells, and rough inscriptions carved upon them. Still others were walled up with brick, and there was nothing to tell who moldered within. These, said I, are the last homes of the poor and the stranger ; while my pulse throbbed at the thought that I, too, might find such a place to lay my failing frame, far from the scenes of childhood, an adventurer in the great city of the South. Behind me were the tombs of those who had walked in high places—the generals, the governors, the important men of provincial Louisiana—men sent over from France to exercise authority, and at last interred with pomp and honor. As I turned once more to view them, a solitary chamelion, which had crawled upon one to bask in the sun, shot suddenly from my gaze into a crevice of it. Yes, noble

and puissant men, ye too must die ! The earth, which your proud feet almost scorned to touch, shall receive your moldering dust to itself again. And by thy side, Right Royal Governor and Judge, the poor beggar who sat at thy gate for charity shall sleep the self-same sleep with thee. The worm shall eat thy dainty corpse as well as his thin flesh, and the lizard which inhabits his tomb shall likewise gambol over thy bones. And thou, lone stranger, who camest to this metropolis to seek thy fortune, and found that fortune a grave, rest thee well here ! They heed thee not, nor honor thy name, but they—the teeming thousands whose loud hum I hear now—they shall come to hold companionship with thee—

“ As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years—matron and maid,
And the sweet babe, and the gray-headed man—
Shall, one by one, be gathered to thy side
By those who, in their turn, shall follow them.”

My heart was full to bursting. I retraced my steps toward the entrance. There was now a table just inside the gateway, and a silver plate upon it, above which was a placard, “*Souvenez vous les pauvres enfans qui n'avaient pere que Dieu,*” or something to that effect. The little orphans were standing in groups about the neighborhood, and, with the usual attendance of negroes,

made up the crowd I had at first noticed. I was in no mood to slight the request, especially as the plate was almost bare. As I passed, therefore, I dropped into it my largest coin. A priest of mild and benevolent aspect, who sat in the gate, looked up with some surprise ; but I pulled my hat down over my eyes and walked hastily away.

Many of the epitaphs in this cemetery were extremely pathetic and beautiful. But the most tender was that of a young girl whose tomb was in the row of catacombs along the back wall. It gave her name, the dates of her birth and death—she was only seventeen—and, beneath, these words :

Ma Pauvre Fille!

I never saw anything more felicitous. There is one in the Protestant cemetery (I do not remember which row of the catacombs) much like it :

My Brother

William.

Near the first is another name recorded, full of different instruction :

Victime de l'honneur!

Act. 24.

About two months after I had left New Orleans, a young gentleman (whose acquaintance I had made before this visit) of fine abilities and education, and great personal beauty, just rising to public notice at the bar, accepted a challenge to the duel, and was killed—"Victim of honor." He, too, was about twenty-four.

I returned to the St. Charles. That day, and the next one, and the next, I wandered through the streets of New Orleans, and saw many strange and beautiful objects before I started home ; but the memory which dwells most sacredly in my remembrance, and keeps the greenest corner of my heart, is that brief sojourn in the CEMETERY OF ST. LOUIS.

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